

Empire, or multitude

Transnational Negri

John Kraniauskas

With the publication of *Empire*,* the oeuvre of the Italian political philosopher and critic Antonio Negri – until recently an intellectual presence confined to the margins of Anglo-American libertarian Marxist thought – has been transported into what is fast becoming an established and influential domain of transnational cultural theory and criticism. Michael Hardt's mediating role, as translator of key texts by Negri and other radical Italian intellectuals (such as Paulo Virno), and now as co-author of *Empire* itself, has been crucial over the years in helping to establish and maintain his reputation. Published by Harvard University Press, the book comes to us with the stamp of approval of important contemporary critics – political philosopher Étienne Balibar, subalternist historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, Marxist cultural critic Fredric Jameson, urban sociologist Saskia Sassen, Slovenian critic-at-large Slavoj Žižek and novelist Leslie Marmon Silko – whose words dazzle the potential reader from the book's dust jacket. *Empire* is presented by them as 'an amazing *tour de force*' (Balibar), 'irresistible, iconoclastic ... [r]evolutionary, even visionary' (Silko), and 'with enormous intellectual depth' (Sassen). It is 'one of the most brilliant, erudite, and yet incisively political interpretations to date of the phenomenon called "globalization"' writes Chakrabarty; and more – 'The first great new theoretical synthesis of the new millennium', according to Jameson, 'a comprehensive new historical narrative, which is both a critique of a wide variety of contemporary theory and a prophetic call for energies to come'. Thus *Empire* arrives as a prepackaged intellectual event imprinted with its status as both a galvanizing political document and a fundamental critical diagnosis of contemporary global capitalism. Few works of radical criticism have been so well 'placed' in the intellectual market. For Žižek,

the authors offer us 'nothing less than a rewriting of *The Communist Manifesto* for our time' which 'ring[s] the death-bell not only for the complacent liberal advocates of the "end of history", but also for pseudo-radical Cultural Studies which avoid the full confrontation with today's capitalism'. One effect of such praise, however, is that *Empire* is freighted with the difficult task of having to live up to itself, as its eulogists have portrayed it.

There is some truth in the words (become advertising) of these critics. On the one hand, *Empire* is indeed a grand work of synthesis, but a synthesis primarily of the work of Negri himself. Over approximately thirty years of writing, much of it spent in prison and exile, Negri has creatively engaged with: transformations in the forms of capital accumulation, class recomposition and working class 'self-valorization'; the writings of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, amongst others; and the political philosophy of Spinoza and Machiavelli, as well as subsequent theories and practices of revolution and state sovereignty. This has been largely ignored in the Anglo-American academy. With Hardt, himself an insightful reader of contemporary French philosophy and Italian political theory, Negri has now extended this conceptual labour into the heart of the globalized present characterized, they suggest, by an emerging postcolonial and post-imperialist 'global form of sovereignty': *Empire*.¹ On the other hand, although no doubt written enthusiastically and with a rather curious image of the political subject (or 'militant') in mind, the work clearly is not, like Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*, the founding text of a political party, an organizational form with which – at least in so far as it internalizes an image of the state into its practice – Negri has little sympathy. Moreover, the transformations in the communicative,

* Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 2000. xvii + 478 pp., £21.95 hb., 0 674 25121 0.

affective and knowledge bases of ‘imperial’ capital and labour which Negri and Hardt outline, as well as the critical intentionality of their conceptualization (as they transform Marx on value and Foucault on power), brings the work into close contact with the concerns of contemporary cultural studies. The works of Stuart Hall, Fredric Jameson and Gayatri Spivak immediately come to mind in this regard. Arguably, the work of translation involved in the co-authorship of *Empire* precisely entails making Negri readable in this new milieu.²

Value and refusal

Negri’s writing comes in large measure from the particular experience of the Italian New Left, characterized by both state and anti-statist political violence, amidst a generalized crisis of political representation that extended into the working class, the perceived betrayals of the Italian Communist Party (the ‘historical compromise’), and the mushrooming of a multitude of radical social-movement-based political organizations. Some of these fed into quite powerful armed groups such as the Red Brigades, whilst others created the political movement with which, theoretically at least, Negri is most associated: Autonomia.³ As is well known, in Italy the events of 1968 actually began in 1967, and lasted well into the 1970s. It was probably the sustained character of the crisis, combined with political marginalization, that brought Negri and his intellectual circle into more or less direct contact with transformations in the labour process that were to be analysed later, elsewhere, as post-Fordism, ‘flexible accumulation’ or ‘cultural economy’.⁴ The difference in the approach of Negri and his colleagues, however, is that it constitutes what might be considered a genuine materialist ‘post-Marxism’, a working-through and development of central critical concepts to be found in *Capital* and the *Grundrisse* ‘beyond Marx’, rather than an abandonment of their theoretical terrain. From this point of view, for example, the so-called ‘nomadism’ of contemporary social movements is intimately tied to the socialization of production as well as to contemporary reconfigurations and movements of (abstract) labour.⁵

In Negri’s work, like that of Paulo Virno, Sergio Bologna, Franco Piperno, Maurizio Lazzarato and Michael Hardt, Marx’s theory of value is interpreted as being *immediately* political.⁶ In this respect, he clearly belongs to that strand of Western Marxist thought known as ‘political’ (rather than ‘cultural’) Marxism. But, unlike Nicos Poulantzas, for example, or even Lenin and Gramsci, Negri does not attempt

to supplement an incomplete Marx to make good a perceived lack, either with regard to his discussion of labour or, as we shall see below, in his philosophical approach to the state. Rather, first, he restores historical relativity to ideas like ‘value’ and ‘cooperation’, transforming them internally so as to address the present – in this case, by extending the idea of social labour (and social capital) beyond the bounds of Marx’s critical horizon constituted by the factory system of machinofacture. In Negri’s periodization this, now past, social organization of labour begins in 1848 and ends around 1968. Second, and here Negri reads the Marx of the *Grundrisse* against the Marx of *Capital*, he endows the historical subject of both value and social cooperation – living labour – with a founding ontological force.

From this point of view, labour *power* is both heteronomous and autonomous, object and subject: it is made (as labour), but it makes (as power). Together, political ontology bolstered by historical critique produce Negri’s metaphysical re-vision of Marxism, which goes so far as to suggest that the *form of value* – as the ‘material representation’ of social cooperation, exploitation and the positivity of labour – is ‘the transcendental material of a determinate society’, and that as a critical concept it has ‘a higher ontological intensity than the simple mode of production’. This is because in it the economic, the juridical and the ideological are all ‘gathered under the category of the political’. Gramsci’s attempts at thinking across, rather than between, base and superstructure in the idea of ‘hegemony’ is probably influential here. Negri, however, refers to Marx’s analysis of money in the *Grundrisse*, where, in a context of financial crisis ‘the modern function of value is transformed into a function of command’, that is, monetary policy. Since the ‘stuff’ of value is abstract labour, the critique of political economy becomes in Negri a ‘critique of labour’.⁷

The work of Mario Tronti was crucial in conceptualizing this double dimension of living labour as ‘labour’ and ‘power’, especially his reflections on the ‘strategy of refusal’. ‘The working class’, he writes, ‘*does what it is*’.⁸ In this sense, thinking about what is always the case, in the first instance, rather than in the last – that is, the ontological primacy of living labour – is central to Negri’s thought. Even at its most prophetic, he writes, historical materialism ‘runs the risk of constituting a natural history’ of accumulation rather than ‘showing the movements of class struggle in [the] light of catastrophe and innovation’. This is Negri’s subjectivist (*and* ontologizing) criticism of

the objectivist trend in the Marx of *Capital*.⁹ What Tronti calls ‘the workers’ articulation’ is fundamental in providing such a view with a historical dimension. The working class ‘is, at one and the same time, the *articulation* of capital [as abstract labour] and its dissolution [as class]’. At one level this is obvious. But, he goes on to write, ‘capitalist power seeks to use the workers’ antagonistic will-to-struggle as a motor of its own development ... exploitation is born, historically, from the necessity of capital to escape from its *de facto* subordination to the class [of] worker-producers.’ And more: ‘it is the directly political thrust of the working class that necessitates economic development on the part of capital.’ He refers to this ‘political thrust’ as ‘refusal’: ‘What are workers doing when they struggle against their employers? Aren’t they, above all, saying “No” to the transformation of labour power into labour?’ The always-already-given potentiality for refusal is the living reminder that, in fact, the working class, while not the ruling class, is most definitely the historically dominant one; it simultaneously ‘provokes’ the bourgeoisie into existence as a class beyond competition and ‘provides’ capital with its labouring subject. Capital, meanwhile, responds to refusal ‘with continual technological “revolutions” in the organization of work’, that is, by generating ‘development’ – because, for capital, less (class) is more (value).¹⁰ This may be thought of as Tronti’s version of the romantic notion, associated with the young Lukács, of the proletariat as ‘the identical subject-object’ of history. It is also, more clearly, his version of working-class ‘autonomy’. Finally, it is the place where, via Tronti, Negri’s thought joins the tradition of ‘left-wing’ communism.¹¹

Value and exodus

The central topos of *Empire* is the idea of ‘passage’. Working at both geo-historical and theoretical levels, it is an example of what Bakhtin calls a ‘chronotope’, embedding representations into crystallized spatio-temporal realities. In *Empire* these realities are what are conventionally known as ‘transitions’ – to and from modernity – that are fought over politico-historically and/or negotiated conceptually. Although it is used in the book, in truth – at least for Negri – the idea of passage *replaces* that of transition, which, because it narrativizes from the point of view of given or ideal state forms, he regards as a ‘bastard’ concept.¹² The most important chronotope for Bakhtin is what he calls ‘the way’, a figure mapping life as formation and associated with the path (or passage) of the hero of the *Bildungsroman* through the socio-cultural and

linguistic heterogeneity of their world.¹³ Conceptually, *Empire* is such a travel-and-learning-book too: it navigates and explores a new world of value – that is, new social configurations of capital, labour and power. And although the processes referred to by the idea of ‘refusal’ remain at work in the passages to the new imperial order as described by Hardt and Negri, they have also been transformed and transnationalized. (Refusal in Tronti, like the form of value in Marx, remains tied to factory machinofacture and the real subsumption of labour power to capital.) Even so, politically and philosophically, in *Empire* the idea of refusal still works conceptually to mark the power of living labour in valorization (the production of value):

Theories of the passages to and beyond imperialism that privilege the pure critique of the dynamics of capital risk undervaluing the power of the real motor that drives capitalist development from its deepest core: the movements and struggles of the proletariat. ... History has a logic only when subjectivity rules it, only when (as Nietzsche says) the emergence of subjectivity reconfigures efficient causes in the development of history. The power of the proletariat consists precisely in this.

The echoes of Tronti are evident here. For this reason, the imperial order itself is also a kind of socioeconomic and juridico-political reaction formation, but one in which, according to Hardt and Negri, the recomposition of value is ‘outside’ or ‘beyond measure’, and characterized by the real subsumption of the social to capital. Meanwhile, one way of beginning to think the power of labour power in this new context has been through the idea of ‘exodus’: ‘Mobility and mass worker nomadism always express a refusal and a search for liberation.... Desertion and exodus are a powerful form of class struggle within and against imperial postmodernity’, they write.¹⁴

Empire, however, does not present us with a detailed account of the globalized imperial present. Rather, it traces its pre-history, the multiple passages that have led to its formation, including the conceptual ones that have reflected critically on its making. Part One sets out the legal and bio-political coordinates of the new imperial order as it is ‘called into being’, whilst Part Four, looking to its possible fall, sets out an anti-imperial politics grounded in the potentiality of the ‘multitude’ – in their view, the political correlate of living labour. Parts Two and Three make up the main body of the text and narrate the history of Empire in and out of modernity in processes of political decolonization, economic recentring and globalized administration, at



the levels of sovereignty and production, respectively. Of course, sovereignty and production continuously move across each other, but, given that Empire is primarily thought as being a 'global form of sovereignty', it is the political dimension of the analysis that dominates – although, it should immediately be added, in the form of a critique of sovereignty. Particularly important here are Empire's strategies of 'universal integration', the affirmation of cultural differences and their hierarchical administration. The form of value of Empire, and thus its existence as a globalized capital-and-state formation, is not really discussed.

Prolonged or detailed discussion of transformations in the transnational social organization of labour, the world market, or the imperial accumulation of capital is noticeably absent. This is because of the simultaneous de-differentiation of the political and the economic moments of exploitation, on the one hand, and the dispersal and socialization of production beyond the factory, on the other: 'exploitation is therefore the production of an armory of instruments for the control of the time of social cooperation', writes Negri elsewhere.¹⁵ In *Empire*, however, this is not reflected upon directly as a question of value but, rather, and this is the distinctive contribution of the book (and, arguably, its major achievement), of *value as it is transformed by bio-power*. The juridical and ideological 'are gathered under the category of the political' but the economic loses its real and theoretical specificity. The dominance of finance capital within a

world of globalized production and circulation is taken as given and its terrain politically re-described: first, according to new logics of segmentarity, flows and command; and, second, as ridden with the ever-present potentialities of crises (or 'corruption').¹⁶ The limits of modern imperialism, for example, so important in Rosa Luxemburg's account of the necessity of an 'outside' for the realization of capital, have been breached, such that now capital has no limits or outsides except for those that have – always already – been internalized. Conceptualizations of trans-, multi- or international capital are, in *Empire*, confined to the past. But there is very little engagement with contemporary alternatives: world systems theory or reinvigorated dependency analyses, in which the globalized world is described as a process of complex recentring – for example, around a China–Japan East Asian axis – or for which the economic power of the USA is still thought to be dominant. There is, however, a highly polemical affirmation of the centrality of US history and sovereign politics: Empire is the historical realization of the US constitution *beyond* and *through* US neo-colonialism (both internal and external), emerging out of Independence, expansive nation-formation (and the ideology of the frontier), slavery and Civil War, immigration and violent class conflict, and the Cold War. Such arguments similarly displace and confine alternative explanations, as well as the politics of radical nationalist anti-imperialisms associated with them, to the past as pre-imperial.¹⁷

Changes in processes of production are, however, still present and narrativized under the idea of ‘post-modernization’, in which the social and cultural effects of contemporary technologies on labour – informatization, networking, spectacle, communication – are foregrounded. Essentially, they involve the technological harnessing of the superstructure by the economic base, a ‘cultural turn’ in production putting entertainment, the symbols and electronic syntax of computer systems, the speed of information highways, social knowledges and affect to work. All this clearly involves changes in the contents of value, the characteristics of labour power – now mainly intellectual, communicative and affective – and the transnationalization of the parameters of social cooperation. The factory can no longer provide the model for thinking about either exploitation or the subjective power of labour power (and thus class politics). Two related concepts come to the fore here: ‘general intellect’, a concept used by Marx to describe the social organization and use of knowledge in labour; and ‘immaterial labour’, which describes its communicative and cultural inputs. As Hardt and Negri note, these ideas have, in the main, been developed by Italian critics such as Paulo Virno and Maurizio Lazzarato. However, although fundamental to the new recompositions of capital and labour, in their view, they lack embodiment in the terrain of the bio-political. This criticism is extended to Virno’s notion of ‘exodus’, the self-valorizing strategy of labour power which he derives

from the post-Fordist real subsumption of the social by capital.¹⁸

Virno’s political theory of exodus extends refusal into ‘new times’ as a line of flight. It is an attempt to develop ‘the publicness of Intellect outside of Work, and in opposition to it’; that is, to recapture the intellectual and communicative labour power appropriated by capital and state in immaterialized abstract labour and technocratic administration.

The subversion of capitalist relations of production henceforth develops only with the institution of a non-State public sphere, a political community that has as its hinge general intellect.

Rather than delinking production from relations of production and exploitation as it is transformed by new knowledges, the media and communication, Virno and Lazzarato, like Negri, extend and reformulate the idea of exploitation so as to take into account the socialization and transformation of labour power (including symbolic manipulation, computerization and the creation of new human–machine hybrids), as well as the reconfiguration – that is, the speeding up – of production–consumption feedback loops, and the relocation of the processes of valorization along new lines of social cooperation. (According to Lazzarato, immaterial labour’s cycle of production operates ‘outside in the society at large, at a territorial level that we would call “the basin of immaterial labor”’). In particular, concrete labour is subjected to new forms



of digital abstraction, whilst the university becomes established as a key knowledge–capital interface in the organization of ‘general intellect’. In this context, exodus consists in the creation of an alternative ‘proletarian public sphere’ or, in Virno’s words, the ‘foundation of a Republic’ that takes its leave from the state.¹⁹

Exodus is thus a form of self-valorization constituted by ‘mass intellectuality’ or the now ‘socialized’ worker, characterized by Negri as ‘a bundle of knowledge, power and love, the likes of which have never been seen before. Science, the artificiality of knowledge, ethical deterritorialization and communism constitute the elements of an irreducible ontological determination – that is, a decisively new, highly original, *ontological break*’.²⁰ Once again, the power of labour power. Indeed, Hardt and Negri also refer to a ‘machinic exodus’. And this picture is globalized in *Empire* by the introduction of not only the transnational flows of capital and structures of command (‘The establishment of a global society of control that smooths over the striae of national boundaries goes hand in hand with the realization of the world market and the real subsumption of global society under capital’) but also the ‘mobile multitude’ (‘Mass migrations have become necessary for production’). The pathways ‘forged, mapped’ and ‘travelled’ by such labour are, moreover, in the view of Hardt and Negri, full of the promises of autonomy: ‘[a] new geography is established by the multitude as the productive flows of bodies define new rivers and ports ... their paths are what brings the “earthly city” out of the clouds and confusion that Empire casts over it.’²¹ In *Empire* exodus becomes a transnational passage to ‘global citizenship’, the ‘right to a social wage’ and the ‘right to appropriation’ – the three concrete political demands made in the book. The first two are reformist, establishing, in their demand for recognition, the parameters of a global participatory political arena within Empire; the third, however, transgresses imperial right in its demand for the autonomous pursuit of (and passage to) communism.²²

Value and affect

The idea of ‘affect’ plays a decisive and multifaceted role in *Empire*. First, it separates Negri and Hardt’s thoughts on immaterial labour from those of their Italian colleagues. Second, as mentioned above, affect pulls value and living labour into the domain of the bio-political (pulls economics into politics). Here, affect is Janus-faced, looking, on the one hand, to the

sovereign power of bio-political command (as value ‘looks’ to accumulation) and, on the other, to the constituent power of the multitude (as value looks to labour power). Third, underlining the importance for the authors of the writing of Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari, the idea of affect brings the work into the conceptual field of cultural studies.

In Hardt and Negri’s account of the postmodernization of production, the communicative and linguistic dimension of immaterial labour is complemented by affective labour. They insist that ‘[t]he danger of the discourse of general intellect is that it risks remaining entirely on the plane of thought, as if the new powers of labor were only intellectual and not also corporeal.’ It remains ‘too pure, almost angelic.’ Affective labour, in contrast, is labour in the ‘bodily mode’, a labour of ‘human contact and interaction’. It includes not only the ‘creation and manipulation of affect’ by the entertainment industries but also the feminized care-work provided in domestic labour and by welfare industries and services (public and private). It is this kind of work ‘entirely immersed in the corporeal [and] the somatic’ – affective labour – that meshes social reproduction into the forces of material production. The growing importance of the service industries bares witness to this transformation. Life as contact and interaction becomes not only the object of production but also a powerful productive resource (‘living’ labour power) and source of value:

Intelligence and affect (or really the brain co-extensive with the body), just when they become the primary productive powers, make production and life coincide across the terrain on which they operate, because life is nothing other than the production and reproduction of the set of bodies and brains.... [L]ife is what infuses and dominates all production. In fact, the value of labor and production is determined deep in the viscera of life.

The crossing of production and reproduction in affective labour thus throws up life for ‘postmodern’ *bio-political* command in ways that far exceed the disciplinary regimes described by Foucault. As was the case for both Marx and Tronti, in Foucault’s account of the disciplinary regimes of bio-power, factory machinofacture also acts as a determining sociopolitical horizon; and, as we have seen, production and command have been radically dispersed into what Deleuze and Guattari have called a ‘society of control’ – a society of permanent education, of deskilling and reskilling, in which social identity is emblematically given (and monitored)

in the recording powers of the magnetic strip of both credit and identity cards. Labour is no longer buried in factories, but travels through the gleaming surfaces of what Marc Augé calls ‘non-places’.²³ In this context of the ‘immaterialization’ of labour beyond the factory bio-power is, for Negri and Hardt, ‘another name for the real subsumption of society under capital.’ ‘[B]oth’, they continue, ‘are synonymous with the globalized productive [and simultaneously reproductive, one might add, thinking of United Nations policy in the so-called developing countries] order’. For globalization in Negri’s view is both extensive and intensive: it extends capital’s domain transnationally through markets whilst absorbing, and thus transforming, the social. With affective labour, labour power and the production of value are radically dispersed and located in what the authors of *Empire* will also call a ‘non-place’ beyond measure: ‘[t]he sublime has become normal’.²⁴

Like refusal, affect is an idea with a double dimension, both revealing the new all-pervasive powers of imperial capital and pointing to the founding and autonomous power of living labour in its political mode – what in *Empire* is referred to as ‘the collective bio-political body’ of the multitude. In this regard, affect becomes, after Spinoza, the ‘power to act’. This is where, first, it begins to turn away and against bio-political power and, second, it becomes locked into the history of those practices of sovereign power Hardt and Negri trace in their work about the dawn of the modern secular state. In extending value ‘beyond measure’, affect brings labour into contact with its own historical potentiality and power as ontological ground, with what Deleuze and Guattari called ‘desiring production’:²⁵

the vitality of the productive context, the expression of labor as desire, and its capacities to constitute the bio-political fabric of Empire from below. Beyond measure refers to *the new place in the non-place*, the place defined by the productive activity that is autonomous from any external regime of measure. Beyond measure refers to a *virtuality* that invests the entire bio-political fabric of imperial globalization. By the virtual we understand the set of powers to act (being, loving, transforming, creating) that reside in the multitude.



Hardt and Negri continue, now reconnecting affect back, via the powers of the multitude, to the power of living labour:

The passage from the virtual through the possible to the real is the fundamental act of creation. Living labour is what constructs the passageway from the virtual to the real; it is the vehicle of possibility.

The echoes of Tronti’s heterodox Marxism are still apparent here, rewritten according to Deleuze and Guattari’s neo-positivist ontology of becoming. In many ways *Empire* – and the latter’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, which Hardt and Negri explicitly take as a model – reads somewhat like a natural history, positing the *potenza* of life in living labour against, for example, the spirit of negation. But this constitutes its challenge. Affect ‘beyond measure’ thus presents the power of the ‘*new proletariat*’. The proletariat, they explain, in a definition that is, characteristically for Negri, centered on value-and-labour (rather than property-and-mode-of-production) ‘is the general concept

that defines all those whose labour is exploited by capital, the entire cooperating multitude.’ At last, with Empire, the ‘wide landscape of bio-political production allows us to recognize the full generality of the concept of proletariat.’ In the oneness-in-dispersal that is Empire, the multitude and the new proletariat have become one; but one that is not one. The multitude only exists as ‘singularities’.²⁶

In his recent book *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries* (reviewed in *RP* 100) Warren Montag writes of a rhetorical strategy used by Spinoza which he calls ‘the operation of the *sive*’. *Sive* is the Latin conjunction ‘or’ and figures a critical strategy of ‘translation and displacement’. Spinoza used this operation most famously, Montag tells us, in the phrase ‘*Deus, sive Natura*’ (God, or Nature). In this operation, he ‘simultaneously affirms and denies that it affirms the radical abolition of transcendence’.²⁷ In other words, he tells three stories at once: the story of God, the story of Nature and the story of God-as-Nature, or, the story of transcendence, the story of immanence and the story of transcendence-as-immanence. This is what happens in *Empire* too. It tells the story of imperial sovereignty, the story of the multitude and the story of imperial sovereignty-as-multitude.

The ‘multitude’ is both a political and a philosophical concept. Anti-sovereign and anti-dialectical, in *Empire* it is the ‘body without organs’ of politics. From this point of view, the relation between Empire and the social is one of fundamental incommensurability. If the multitude exists ‘*within* Empire and *against* Empire’, there is, however, ‘always a surplus’: ‘[t]he first head of the imperial eagle is a juridical structure and a constituted power, constructed by the machine of bio-political command.’ This is contemporary sovereign power. ‘The other head of the imperial eagle is the plural multitude of productive, creative subjectivities of globalization.... They are in perpetual motion and they form constellations of singularities and events that impose continual global reconfigurations of the system.’ The multitude is not a negative power, they rather ‘nourish, and develop positively their own constituent projects; they work toward the liberation of living labor’. As in Tronti’s ‘workers’ articulation’, the multitude is the historically dominant political power, and Empire ‘a mere apparatus of capture that lives only off the vitality of the multitude.’ Thus, characterized by an ‘ontological lack’, the constituted power of Empire may be seen as ‘a simple abstract trace of the constituent power of the multitude.’ The Deleuze and Guattari of *Anti-Oedipus*

might add their version of fetishism here, suggesting that the power of Empire nevertheless ‘falls back on’ the multitude to ‘miraculate’ them (that is, write their juridico-political scripts) and ‘ontologize’ itself by appropriating and transforming the living constituent power of the multitude into state constitution and bio-power.²⁸ This is sovereignty. In the words of Hardt and Negri:

Little by little, as the administration develops, the relationship between society and power, between the multitude and the sovereign state, is inverted so that now power and the state produce society.²⁹

Reading from below?

Empire gravitates around the political and conceptual core of ‘the multitude’. The stories of sovereignty that are told, centred historically on political revolution and philosophically on the concepts of ‘transcendence’ and ‘representation’, are all stories of, on the one hand, the containment of ‘the immanent forces of the desire and cooperation of the multitude’ and, on the other, of the transference of their powers. In Negri and Hardt’s view, modern sovereignty is a secular inflection, into a plane of immanence, of absolutist monarchy (transcendence within immanence), such that it is possible to speak of monarchical, aristocratic and democratic monarchy – hence their radical republicanism of the multitude, nourished by the work of Machiavelli and Marx, but especially of Spinoza.³⁰

As in Negri’s reading of Marx’s theory of value (inspired by Tronti and Virno), so Hardt and Negri’s reading of Foucault’s account of the dynamics of bio-power (inspired in part by Deleuze and Guattari) is theoretically inflected ‘from below’. In large measure, this is a result of the idea of affect: it transports the power of living ‘immaterial’ labour into the heart of bio-political command and management, and subjects it to ‘worker articulation’, the powers of the multitude. Their evocations of the British and Southern Asian historiographical traditions of ‘history from below’ and ‘subalternism’ thus make both political and conceptual sense. Such theoretical intentionality also characterizes cultural studies, which, from this point of view, is characterized not just, *pace* Žižek, by a postmodern concern for the media and the politics of cultural identity, but also by a radical critique of both the mass mediatic transformation of cultural forms (postmodernization in Jameson’s account) and a theory of ideology that reinstalls domination at the heart of illumination. The ‘ideology critique’ of the Frankfurt School and Althusser provides examples of

such intellectual ‘re-subalternization’.³¹ For Hardt and Negri, however, critique ‘from below’, as negation, remains prone to dialectical recuperation. The idea of the multitude thus also involves dispersal of negation into singularity and ‘no-place’.³² Here, however, it meets Empire as immeasurable value, the time of networked command and dispersed abstract labour: ‘the topography of power no longer has to do primarily with spatial relations but is inscribed, rather, in the temporal displacements of subjectivities. Here we find again the non-place of power.’³³

Empire is a daring and polemical work, inviting critical responses as it makes its ‘way’ through the new world order. But, arguably, it is its founding philosophico-political concept of the multitude that constitutes its main weakness. A melancholic, rather than a joyous, science might suggest that the logic of refusal the multitude stages merely feeds imperial capital with new material; and that the surplus that takes the multitude beyond the measure of dispersed immeasurability is just ‘more of the same’. The multitude here might still be constitutive, but only as what Ernesto Laclau and Judith Butler have theorized as a ‘constitutive outside’, capital’s phantasmatic double which is always located ‘inside’, and productive of, subjectivity.³⁴ Historically, the idea of the multitude emerges with the rise of the bourgeoisie at a moment of historical ‘mutation’, a process of generalized and violent dispossession and capitalist recomposition Marx refers to as ‘so-called primitive accumulation’.³⁵ This is the nightmarish terrain of limitless, almost suicidal, bourgeois possibility – the war of all against all – where there are always more potential capitalists, and more labour to abstract. For the conservative Hobbes, it was the bourgeois multitude that had to be managed and tamed. Riding on the back of refusal, Empire is this historical imaginary’s final realization. For their part, literary and cultural studies might note the images of vampires and saints – specifically, St Francis of Assisi – that appear in *Empire*’s pages: the first (as in Marx’s *Capital*) as a sign of the miraculating powers of capital; and the second as the figure of the future communist ‘militant’ offered up by the text as it ends. Another exemplary representative of proletarian struggle mentioned also comes from the past: the International Workers of the World (IWW) militant. But at this point the multitude threatens to become a sentimentalized, authoritarian other, allegorized and individuated as either heroic or charismatic. Sovereignty threatens to return here as decisionism. In *Empire*’s more literary figurations,

dispersed subjectivity is recuperated and re-made in a return to immanence of transcendence – that is, in the *resacrilization* of the political. From this point of view, liberation theology’s ‘option for the poor’, which is also evoked, verges on melodramatic excess. (‘The poor is god on earth. ... The poor itself is power.’) Finally, apart from noting the redeployment of images from the Christian side of imperial reason (members of the Franciscan Order were some of the first to arrive in the New World to save souls), a subalternist critique of *Empire* might highlight the temporality of its politics. What happens to all those whose labour is subsumed to imperial capital but who have not been postmodernized? As suggested above, the topography of contemporary imperial command, like the multitude, disperses value to the non-place of dialectically irrecoverable time. This is the time of imperial politics, structured by the flows of transnational capital and living labour – the ‘new barbarians’. According to Hardt and Negri,

Being republican today, then, means first of all struggling within and constructing against Empire, on its hybrid, modulating terrains. And here we should add, against all moralisms and all positions of nostalgia, that this new imperial terrain provides greater possibilities for creation and liberation. The multitude, in its will to be-against and its desire for liberation, must push through Empire to come out the other side.

However, their description of the ‘hybrid constitution’ of the emerging imperial order turns out to be only a hybridized system of monarchic, aristocratic and democratic *functions* that remains socially abstract and temporally homogenous.³⁶ In contrast, Manuel Castells’s version of network capitalism is broken-backed, constituting a fundamentally disjunctive order – a hybridized system combining the ‘timeless time’ of the space of flows, and other, more ‘crystallized’, times of the space of places.³⁷ From this point of view, politics is temporally hybridized according to the social relations of specific capital–state formations, producing the contemporary neo-liberal imperial state as a complex system of assemblages constituted *across* spaces, times and singularities – mediated by self-representation. Such a terrain, where the spaces of flows are crisscrossed by spaces of places, also produces the political times of resistance and liberation. To reduce a concern for other times to ‘nostalgia’ would thus be to re-impose the narrative of development – that is, the abstract time of imperial capital – in the guise of revolution.

Notes

I would like to thank Alberto Moreiras, Peter Osborne and Carol Watts for their help in writing this article.

1. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. xii.
2. See *Empire*, p. 415, note 5, which, apart from Jameson and Spivak, relates the work to that of Arjun Appadurai, Giovanni Arrighi, Arif Dirlik, David Harvey and Edward Said. It is noticeable that none of Negri's Italian or French colleagues is mentioned in this list. This underlines the importance of the Left US academy as a relay point for the transnationalization of theoretical production. The chapter on postmodernist and postcolonial theory, however, apart from bolstering the work's anti-dialectical argument and containing an uncharacteristically favourable reading of the work of Homi Bhabha, is one of the most cursory of the book.
3. By 1967 Negri was, ironically, Professor of Doctrines of the State at Padua University, where he had taught philosophy of law since 1959 and been an active participant in local politics and journalism as a member of the Italian Socialist Party. In 1963 he left the Socialist Party and became involved in the local workers' movement on the margins of the Communist Party, running a *Capital* reading group with his wife Paola Meo and Massimo Cacciari (now an important philosopher known for his writings on architecture and, until recently, mayor of Venice) amongst local petrochemical workers at the Porto Marghera plant. That same year the journal *Potere Operaio* (*Workers' Power*) made its appearance. At first a supplement of the local Socialist Party journal, it later became the organ of the Porto Marghera plant workers. By 1967 Negri was also contributing to a number of other journals such as the influential *Quaderni Rossi*, associated with an emerging 'autonomous' workers' movement and publishing the work of heterodox communist theoreticians such as Mario Tronti. At the University of Padua, meanwhile, he was at the centre of a group of radical intellectuals based at the Institute for Political Sciences, including Sergio Bologna, Alisa del Re and Maria Rosa Della Costa. After the 'hot summer' of 1969 a host of organizations to the left of the Communist Party were formed, including *Potere Operaio*, now not just a journal, *Avanguardia Operaia* and, most famously perhaps, *Lotta Continua*. With the 'historical compromise' between the Communist Party and Christian Democrat Party of 1973, however, *Potere Operaio* went into self-dissolution. The years that followed saw the emergence of student and youth movements, such as the 'Metropolitan Indians', criss-crossed in a host of alliances with working class groups, which began to turn their back on the 'sixty-eighters'. Many former political militants, meanwhile, gravitated towards urban guerrilla organizations. But the movement known as 'Autonomia' also emerged, working amongst the unemployed and young migrant workers 'refusing' to work. For the historical and political background, see Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943–1988*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1990; and Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978*, Verso, London, 1990. For Negri's personal background, see the translators' introductions to Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the 'Grundrisse'*, trans. H. Cleaver, M. Ryan and M. Viano, ed. J. Fleming, Autonomedia/Pluto, New York and London, 1991 (1979).
4. See *Empire*, p. xvi: 'In the imperial world the economist, for example, needs a basic knowledge of cultural production to understand the economy, and likewise the cultural critic needs a basic knowledge of economic process to understand culture.'
5. *Empire*, p. 213. British Communism's own response to 'postmodernism', 'post-Fordism' and 'New Times' was to reassert orthodoxy rather than subject such discourses to a more materialist 'symptomatic' reading.
6. See the articles by these authors in Paulo Virno and Michael Hardt, eds, *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, trans. M. Boscagli et al., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1996.
7. Antonio Negri, 'Twenty Theses on Marx: Interpretation of the Class Situation Today', in Saree Makdisi, Cesare Casarino and Rebecca E. Karl, eds, *Marxism Beyond Marxism*, Routledge, New York and London, 1996, p. 150, and *Marx Beyond Marx*, p. 25. This is the point of Derrida's reply to Negri's criticisms of *Specters of Marx*: in Negri's demand that philosophical discourse take on a dimension of practicality, Negri, Derrida insists, re-ontologizes a now spectralized 'value' in both exploitation (the social organization of labour) on the one hand, and communism (constitutive resistance) on the other. Negri, for his part, insists that his is 'a new – post-deconstructive – ontology'. See Antonio Negri, 'The Specter's Smile', and Jacques Derrida, 'Marx & Sons', in Michael Sprinker, ed., *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's 'Specters of Marx'*, Verso, London and New York, 1999, pp. 5–16, 213–69.
8. Mario Tronti, 'The Strategy of Refusal', trans. Red Notes, in *Italy: Autonomia. Post-Political Politics, Semiotexte*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1980, p. 29 (originally published in *Quaderni Rossi* in 1965). Tronti was to remain a member of the PCI.
9. Negri, 'Twenty Theses on Marx', p. 151.
10. Tronti, 'The Strategy of Refusal', pp. 29, 31, 32, 30. 'It is the workers' struggle that materially imposes reformism on capital', says Negri in 'Labor in the Constitution', written originally in 1964, but not published until the mid-1970s. In this essay Negri develops the political side of the effects of refusal: 'Labor, as a source of complete social production, becomes a source of the State.... Not even right and law can escape its power.' In Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Labour of Dionysus: A Critique of State Form*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1994, p. 82.
11. Lukács's phrase continues as follows: 'the subject of action; the "we" of the genesis: namely the proletariat', Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. R. Livingstone, Merlin Press, London, 1971, p. 149. Tronti then, and Negri subsequently, hold strong anti-socialist positions – which the latter regards fundamentally as the planned administration of capitalism (and labour).
12. Antonio Negri, 'Constituent Republic', in Virno and Hardt, eds, *Radical Thought in Italy*, pp. 219–20.
13. Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', in *The Dialogical Imagination*, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981, pp. 84–258.
14. *Empire*, pp. 234–5, 212–13. On the 'worker attack of

- the highest intensity directed against the disciplinary regimes of capitalist labor', at least in Europe and the USA, see pp. 260–79. The authors point out that the 'attack was expressed, first of all, as a general refusal of work and specifically of factory work.... [T]he refusal of the disciplinary regime and the affirmation of the sphere of non-work became the defining features of a new set of collective practices and a new form of life.'
15. Negri, 'Twenty Theses on Marx', p. 154.
 16. Since, as we shall see below, value and labour are defined under Empire according to the new logics of network communication, exploitation is also redefined as 'the expropriation of cooperation and the nullification of the meanings of linguistic production.' From this point of view, '[a]ntagonisms to exploitation are articulated across the global networks of production and determine crises on each and every node.' 'Crisis is', according to Hardt and Negri, 'coextensive with the postmodern totality of capitalist production; it is proper to imperial control.' See *Empire*, p. 385 and, for 'corruption', p. 201.
 17. *Empire*, pp. 44–6, 51–2, 105–9, 227–39, 283–4. On the rise of Japan and China, see Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*, Verso, London, 1994; and André Gunder Frank, *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age*, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles and London, 1998. On the continuing strength of US capital, see Robert Brenner, 'The Economics of Global Turbulence', *New Left Review* 229, May–June 1998. David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton's, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999, provides a useful overview of many of the debates concerning globalization.
 18. Maurizio Lazzarato, 'Immaterial Labour', and Paulo Virno, 'Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus', in Virno and Hardt, eds, *Radical Thought in Italy*, pp. 133–47, 189–210. See also the essays by Marco Rivelli and Franco Piperno in the same volume, as well as Negri's reflection on 'intellectual cooperation' in the era of the 'socialized worker' in *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century*, trans. J. Newell, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 47–60, 75–101.
 19. Lazzarato, 'Immaterial Labour', p. 137; Virno, 'Virtuosity and Revolution', pp. 196–7; Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. 290–92. I have not been able to do justice to the density and complexity of either Virno's or Lazzarato's essays here. For an informative introduction to these debates, see Nick Dyer-Withford's recent *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High-Technology Capitalism*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1999. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's critical adaptation of Habermas's notion of the 'public sphere' has probably been influential for Virno's conception of exodus (Bob Marley's song also comes to mind). See *Public Sphere and Experience: Towards an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. P. Labanyi et al., Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis and London, 1993 (1972).
 20. Negri, *The Politics of Subversion*, p. 73.
 21. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. 367, 332, 397–8.
 22. *Ibid.*, pp. 393–413.
 23. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. 29–30, 292–3, 363–5. For bio-power, see Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge (The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1)*, trans. R. Hurley, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1998 (1976); and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'Postscript on the Society of Control', *October* 59, 1992. For 'non-places', see Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. J. Howe, Verso, London and New York, 1995.
 24. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. 364–5; and Antonio Negri, 'Value and Affect', trans. M. Hardt, *Boundary 2*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1999, pp. 83, 87.
 25. 'It is at work everywhere', Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem and H.R. Lane, Viking, New York, 1977 (1972), p. 1.
 26. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. 30, 357, 402.
 27. Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries*, Verso, London and New York, 1999, p. 4.
 28. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 10–11.
 29. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 88.
 30. Antonio Negri, 'Reliqua Desiderantur: A Conjecture for a Definition of the Concept of Democracy in the Final Spinoza', in Warren Montag and Ted Stolze, eds, *The New Spinoza*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1997, p. 222. See also his *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, trans. M. Boscagli, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1999 (1992), and *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. M. Hardt, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and Oxford, 1991 (1981). *Empire* is a condensation and extension into globalized imperial sovereignty of Negri's *Insurgencies*. For Negri, Machiavelli's republicanism is part of a broader Renaissance tradition of revolutionary (anti-humanist) humanism.
 31. See my 'Globalization is Ordinary: The Transnationalization of Cultural Studies', *Radical Philosophy* 90, July/August 1998, pp. 9–19.
 32. In this regard, it has the same philosophical function as Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'multiplicity', whose invention, they insist, 'marked the end of dialectics'. 'The notion of unity ... appears only when there is a power takeover in the multiplicity', they write. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. B. Massumi, Athlone Press, London, 1988 (1980), pp. 483, 8. The anti-Hegelianism of the early philosophical writings of Deleuze is highlighted in Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, University of London Press, London, 1993.
 33. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 319.
 34. See Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, Verso, London, 1990; and Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993.
 35. Negri, *Insurgencies*, p. 38. Negri describes Machiavelli's work as a political reflection on/of this mutation.
 36. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. 157, 218, 316–19.
 37. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, Blackwell, Cambridge MA and Oxford, 1997. See Simon Bromley, 'The Space of Flows and Timeless Time: Manuel Castells's *The Information Age*', *Radical Philosophy* 97, Sept/Oct 1999, pp. 6–17.